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SPINOZA AND MODERN PSYCHOLOGY.

By AMY E. TANNER.

Spinoza's proof *de more geometrico* and his great labors to reduce all the statements of his ethics to this form, have oftentimes blinded the student to the true modernity of his ideas. To find peering out from his stilted phraseology and labored demonstration a theory of the origin and development of the mind that is essentially modern and that forecasts much of modern method, is an interesting experience, especially when we realize that this was probably the theory which he employed unconsciously in everyday life.

With Spinoza's general theory every one is familiar. There is but one substance, God, which manifests itself under the two attributes of thought and extension. These two attributes run parallel to each other in all their modes, and hold no causal relationship to each other except as they are each referred to God.

Here at the very beginning we see an interesting obscurity in Spinoza's thought. He says distinctly that mind and extension are not different substances but the same seen under a different attribute. Is it not then quite as unsuitable to speak of a parallelism between them as of a causal relation? Ought we not rather to say that when God reveals himself as thought then this extension appears? But leaving this aside, if he admits that there is but one substance, how can he deny a causal relationship between all forms of this substance?

Taking the theory more in detail and rearranging the order in which Spinoza gives his proofs in order to show the parallelism between him and modern theory, we get the following.

In Part 3, Props. 6, 7 and 9, Spinoza states that everything endeavors to persist in its own being, and that this endeavor is its actual essence. When referred to the mind solely, the endeavor is called will; when to the mind and body in conjunction, appetite, and when the mind is conscious of its endeavor, the consciousness is desire. What would Spinoza call the endeavor when referred solely to the body?

The similarity of this to our modern idea, is very striking. We tend more and more to look upon our mind as it functions to-day as the residuum of countless efforts at self-preservation. One theory that is very commonly accepted states explicitly

that mind arose in the effort of the body to preserve itself, and that when no further effort is necessary, mind retires. This again makes striving the essential feature of the mind, the matrix, so to speak, out of which are differentiated later thought and feeling.

This also is Spinoza's idea, for he goes on to say (Part 3, Props. 11 and 12) that since the essence of the mind is will or the attempt at self-preservation, we shall have pleasure in the passage to a greater perfection and pain in the passage to a lesser one, and we shall endeavor to conceive only the first. The modern pleasure-pain theory, while it realizes more fully than Spinoza could the difficulties in the way of accepting this idea unreservedly, still has no better general theory. It too, says that on the whole pleasure is the sign of well-being and pain of harmfulness to the body.

These general assumptions that Spinoza makes with regard to persistence and to pleasure and pain, make his theory essentially an evolutionary one, in spite of his efforts to make it mathematical. And yet this very endeavor to employ mathematical demonstration is one proof of his modern spirit. If, instead of geometry, he could have used such forms as now are employed both in our physical and psychological laboratories, he would have had the exactness for which he so longed without at the same time petrifying his theory. But he was too early in time for those forms of mathematics.

When we take up more in detail Spinoza's theory of knowledge, we see even more clearly both his closeness to the modern spirit and his separateness from it. He does not argue as to the origin of knowledge. He assumes it in Part 2, Axiom 3, where he says: "Modes of thinking, such as love, desire or any other of the passions, do not take place unless there be in the individual an idea of the thing loved, desired, etc.," and in Prop. 13, he says and demonstrates that "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, in other words, a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else," and in Prop. 11, "The first element which constitutes the actual being of the human mind is the idea of some particular thing actually existing."

That is, the world of extension is the object without which the mind would have no ideas, that is, actually no existence. Surely this comes very close to being a sensationalistic theory of knowledge, in spite of a formal assertion which he makes later on. For all practical purposes it is both sensationalistic and causal, as one can reason from mental to bodily effects and from bodily to mental with complete accuracy. What he really is saying is that without some material with which to work the mind could have no existence, and this material must

be the other attribute of God, the one substance. If God stands ready to display a certain mode of extension every time that there is a certain mode of thought, it surely is not far from being a practical cause and effect relation between the two, though it does seem rather hard on God to make him into a go-between.

Since the object of the human consciousness is only the body, then the mind (Part 2. Props. 14 *et seq.*) will perceive things in proportion as the body is capable of receiving impressions; the ideas that we have bear a direct relation to the number and delicacy of the sense-organs and to our general bodily structure. What we consider our knowledge of external nature is in reality far more a knowledge of our own bodies. To take a modern instance, if we say a book is heavy we mean that our muscles react in a certain way for which our mind has a certain name. Another person may say that the same book is light. The quality of the object is really due to the condition of our sense-organ.

This is the beginning of Berkeley's idealism, one would say, as well as of much of our modern educational and ethical theory, which sets about giving sane ideas of the world by developing a healthy body. If the content of the mind consists solely of its consciousness of bodily changes, then surely nothing is more important to mental balance than bodily health. I do not know that Spinoza elaborated this idea in any of his writings, but his life exemplified his belief in it.

Along with this goes naturally a theory of illusions and of association of ideas (Props. 17 and 18). If we have any idea of an external object, we shall consider it as actually existent, unless we can disprove its existence by means of the other senses. Memory and imagination are explained as due to the permanent changes made in the soft parts of the body by external bodies striking upon the bodily fluids, which in turn strike on these soft parts and alter them. Then if, at another time, without an external body striking the fluids, the fluids strike the soft parts, the idea of the external body will be aroused. In the same manner, if two ideas have been aroused at once, the later arousal of either tends to call up the other. If Spinoza had known a little more about the nervous system he would have written James's chapter on Association of Ideas some two hundred and fifty years ago.

In Prop. 23 we find a valuable suggestion as to psychological method. The mind cannot know itself except in so far as it perceives the ideas of the modifications of the body; that is, to know ourselves we must study perceptions and sensations primarily, not theorize abstractly on the nature of the mind. We must observe the effects of outside stimuli and trace the

connections between external objects and conscious manifestations. We can imagine that Spinoza would heartily adopt experimental psychology, especially as it would afford some of the mathematical demonstration which he loved so well.

In Props. 38 and 39 of Part 2, he also hints at the reason why man is social. Some ideas are common to all men because their bodies agree in certain respects. Then the more that a man's body has in common with other bodies, whether human, animal or inanimate, the more will he have in common with them and the more adequate will the ideas be. That is, to use modern language, our brotherhood with man is due to an actual physical likeness. Or, in Spinozistic speech, each of us is but a mode of the one substance, and the more that mode has in common with other modes whether of thought or extension, the more will we know them. Sympathy rests upon a basis of like feeling, and like feeling is impossible unless the one body is like the other body.

These adequate ideas must not be considered as concepts, or what Spinoza calls general ideas. The latter arise from the fact that our imagination is unable to picture distinctly all the individuals of a class, becomes confused, and loses sight of the minor differences, thus confounding the individuals and keeping clearly in mind only the points in which they all agree. This sort of knowledge can not be depended on, while adequate ideas and intuition can be.

But when we ask how we can know a true idea, we come to what is probably the fundamental difference between Spinoza and modern thought. In Part 2, Prop. 43, he says, "He who has a true idea simultaneously knows that he has a true idea and cannot doubt of the truth of the thing perceived." Again and again he asserts this and he refuses to discuss the question of whether the idea truly represents the object, saying, "As to how a man can be sure that he has ideas that agree with their objects, I have just pointed out with abundant clearness that his knowledge arises from the simple fact that he has an idea which corresponds with its object, in other words, that truth is its own standard."

The centre of his proof seems to be his assumption that we are necessarily conscious of any idea that we have, that is, that consciousness and self-consciousness are really the same, or that if we have an idea we must know that we have it, and not only that, but must know all its characteristics. Then we ought to know not only true ideas at sight, but false ones, and never ought to be deceived. Spinoza is not at all satisfactory here. He says that a false idea is due to confused, fragmentary or inadequate ideas, but still does not explain why we do not

perceive this confusion, etc., if the idea carries its own sign with it.

In his theory of the will he is once more very modern. It is not in the nature of reason to regard things as contingent, but as necessary. The mind is always determined by a cause, which is determined by another cause, and so on *ad infinitum*. There is no freedom of the will.

Still more, both will and understanding are only abstract terms for a sum of particulars. There is no will in the abstract apart from particular volitions, and there is no particular volition apart from ideas. Will and understanding are one and the same thing. There can be no volition or negation save that which the idea, by the very fact of its being an idea, involves (Part 2, Props. 48 and 49). An idea is not like an inanimate picture on a panel he says in various places. It is a living, growing thing, which by its very nature involves a judgment, an affirmation, that is, a volition.

We could hardly have James's theory that all consciousness is motor, stated more explicitly in the absence of modern proofs of it. The denial that mind and volition have an abstract existence, an existence apart from thinking and willing, and the assertion that the essence of the mind is will and that understanding and will are identical;—these assertions take Spinoza over into the most modern of modern thought. The inner need for exact proof must indeed have been compelling in order to force such ideas into the strait-jacket of geometrical demonstration.